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ABSTRACT

The evidence supporting the selecting of students with and without regard to race and sex is discussed. It is concluded that students should be selected by race-sex subgroup. The support for this position centers around three clusters of study results: (1) studies that show no relationship, or perhaps a negative relationship, between traditional predictors (high school grades and test scores) and college grades for blacks; (2) studies that show if traditional predictors are employed, optimum validity is achieved by separate equations or cutoff scores for each race-sex subgroup; and (3) studies that show certain background, interest, attitudinal and motivational variables are useful in predicting minority success, but are not necessarily useful in predicting the academic success of white students. (Author)

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SHOULD HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS BE ADMITTED DIFFERENTIALLY BY RACE AND SEX: THE EVIDENCE

William E. Sedlacek

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SHOULD HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS BE ADMITTED DIFFERENTIALLY BY RACE AND SEX: THE EVIDENCE

WILLIAM E. SEDLACEK

Research Report # 5-75

Summary

The evidence supporting the selecting of students with and without regard to race and sex is discussed. It is concluded that students should be selected by race-sex subgroup. The support for this position centers around three clusters of study results: (1) Studies which show no relationship, or perhaps a negative relationship, between traditional predictors (high school grades and test scores) and college grades for blacks; (2) Studies which show that if traditional predictors are employed, optimum validity is achieved by separate equations or cutoff scores for each race-sex subgroup; (3) Studies which show that certain background, interest, attitudinal and motivational variables are useful in predicting minority success, but are not necessarily useful in predicting the academic success of white students.

The purpose of this article will be to examine the advisability of selecting higher education students separately by race-sex subgroup. A conclusion will be reached based on the available research evidence, and a number of related issues will be discussed.

The Case For Selecting Students Without Regard to Race or Sex

A number of studies have shown that one can employ traditional selection devices such as standardized test scores (e.g., ACT, SAT), high school grades, and high school rank without regard to the race or sex of the students being selected (e.g., Baggaley, 1974; Humphreys, 1973; Schmidt, Berner and Hunter, 1973; Stanley, 1971; Temp, 1971; Thomas and Stanley, 1969).

Stanley (1971), in summarizing the research on predicting the success of "disadvantaged " students, has concluded that admission to selective colleges and universities should be based substantially on test scores and high school grades, regardless of whether the applicant is from a minority racial, ethnic or sociological group. Stanley feels pessimistic about the possibility of remediation for disadvantaged students and states, "an admissions officer ignores test scores at his institution's peril," (1971, p.642).

Humphreys (1973) concludes that most studies that seemingly find differential validity for racial groups contain erroneous statistical logic. The faulty logic is of two types: (1) Correlations or regressions for different racial groups should be compared to each other and not tested as significantly different from 0; (2) because the minority group samples are often much smaller than those of the majority group, we demand a larger coefficient to achieve significance for the minority group. This makes it appear that we have significance for the majority students but not for the minority students.

Thus, a single prediction equation or cutoff score is most fair to all

concerned and will select the best students for a given school. It is particularly important that higher education select the best possible students during the current times of tight budgets, declining enrollments, and a skeptical public. Bad decisions now could severely damage or wreck higher education completely.

The Case For Selecting Students by Race and Sex

There appear to be a growing number of studies which indicate that we cannot use a single equation or selection system for all students (e.g., Baggaley, 1974; Borgen, 1972; Farver, Sedlacek and Brooks, 1975; Goldman, 1973; Horowitz, Sedlacek and Brooks, 1972; Perry, 1972; Pfeifer and Sedlacek, 1970, 1971, 1974; Sedlacek and Brooks, 1975; Temp, 1971). The support for this position centers around three clusters of results. First, there are studies which show no relationship, or perhaps a negative relationship, between traditional predictors and college grades. Sedlacek and Brooks (1975) found that the SAT-Verbal scale had correlated significantly with freshman grades (.56) for black females and was uncorrelated for black males (-.03) in a special program at the University of Maryland, while the SAT-Math scale correlated .16 for black females and -.33 for black males. Thus the SAT-Math scale actually had *negative* validity for black males in that sample. Baggaley (1974) found essentially the same results with blacks at the University of Pennsylvania. The SAT-Verbal correlated .19 with grades for black females and -.04 for black males, while the SAT-Math correlated .38 for black females and -.36 for black males.

The second cluster of studies supporting differential race-sex subgroup prediction involves studies which show that if traditional predictors are to be used, there must be separate equations or cutoffs for each subgroup to achieve optimum validity. Horowitz, et al. (1972), Perry (1972), Pfeifer and Sedlacek (1971), and Temp (1971) all clearly show this. Goldman (1973) presents evidence that even when a general regression equation *over-predicts* how well

minorities will do, it is still unfair to them. He argues that since we have less ability to accurately predict minority student grades (higher standard error of estimate), if we combine race-sex groups and develop a single regression equation we will achieve an equation favoring the more predictable majority applicants. Even if we obtain an over-estimate of minority student grades, it will not be offset by the use of a relatively inaccurate equation. Interestingly, white females tend to be the most predictable race-sex subgroup and any general equation would favor them. That we don't have a great many more white females in higher education is evidence that admissions officers have not been reluctant to balance classes with white males. Black males tend to be the least predictable race-sex subgroup and any general equation would discriminate most against them.

Studies by Farver et al. (1975) and Horowitz et al. (1972) further support the proposition of differential regression equations for race-sex subgroups. They found that if grades beyond the freshman year are predicted, different equations result. Not only are the regression equations different over the years, but blacks become relatively more predictable than whites after the freshman year. Thus, race-sex subgroup equations predicting beyond the freshman year appear particularly appropriate. Studies by Berdie and Prestwood (1975) and Kallingal (1971) further support this conclusion.

The third major cluster of studies supporting the consideration of race-sex subgroups in admissions deals with non-cognitive predictors of minority student success. A number of studies have shown that background, interest, attitudinal and motivational variables are related to minority student success, but are not necessarily useful in predicting the academic success of white students (e.g., DiCesare, Sedlacek and Brooks, 1974; Gurin et al., 1969; Horowitz et al., 1972; Lowman and Spuck, 1975; Perry, 1972; Pfeifer and Sedlacek, 1970, 1974; and Sedlacek and Brooks, 1975.)

Sedlacek and Brooks (1976), in reviewing the non-cognitive predictor studies for minorities concluded that there were seven key non-cognitive variables: (1) Positive self-concept. Confidence, strong "self" feeling, strength of character, determination, independence. (2) Understands and deals with racism. Realist based on personal experiences of racism. Committed to fighting to improve existing system. Not submissive to existing wrongs, nor hateful of society, or a "cop-out." Able to handle racist system. Asserts that the school has a role in fighting racism. (3) Realistic self-appraisal. Recognizes and accepts any academic or background deficiencies and works hard at self-development. (4) Prefers long range goals to short-term or immediate needs. Understands and is willing to accept deferred gratification. (5) Availability of strong support person. Has a person of strong influence available to provide advice. (6) Successful leadership experience. Has shown the ability to organize and influence others within one's cultural/racial contexts. (7) Demonstrated community service. Has shown evidence of contribution to his or her community.

Conclusions

It appears to this writer that the weight of the evidence favors a strong consideration of race-sex subgroups in admissions procedures. While the evidence is not always exact in terms of how to weight the variables, particularly the non-cognitive predictors, there is much support for the aforementioned conclusion. Because of our inability to weight the predictors, it is all the more important that local research be conducted at each school. The studies noted above can serve as guidelines, but the specifics should be developed by the admitting institution.

There are a great many issues relating to minority admissions which will not be discussed here. Interested readers are referred to Sedlacek (1974, a,b,)

and Hixson and Epps (1975), for further information. There is one issue, however, which is especially important when attempting to summarize and evaluate the research in this area. We must remember that the very nature of our information gathering and research methods and our tendency to be conservative in interpreting results work against the minority applicant. Our application forms, interviews, letters of recommendation, tests, and the education system itself were designed for majority people. By having relatively few applicants providing scanty information from atypical backgrounds, it is easy to fall back upon the old standards in admission research, and explain results in terms of "flukes" or methodological problems. It is a time when we must drop a notch or two in our model of inductive science and be willing to piece together some more fragile and misunderstood bits of information. If we do not, we could be risking the future of entire races of people. Recent evidence indicates that the *numbers and percentages* of minorities in higher education are dropping (Sedlacek and Clarke, 1975). Whether this trend continues will depend largely upon the actions of admissions officers and any conclusions we can reach from our research.

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